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SPEECH

BY

COLEMAN YELLOTT,

BEFORE A MEETING OF THE CITIZENS OF YORK COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, CONVENED WITHOUT DISTINCTION OF PARTY, TO EXPRESS THEIR APPROBATION OF THE

COMPROMISE MEASURES

Passed by Congress in September, 1850.

Delivered on the evening of January 7th, 1851, at the Court House in York.

FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN: I am a Southern man, and you are Northern men. But I am an American citizen, and you are American citizens. We have still one common country,—one common government,—one common flag waving over us! Thank God! we are still *fellow-countrymen*. And I am here to-night, (under the invitation of your committee,) to speak, not as a Marylander to Pennsylvanians—not as a Southern man to Northern men, but as an American to speak to American citizens.

Yesterday, I came from my home in Maryland. I crossed the statutory line which divides my State from yours—the South from the North; but I noticed not when or where I passed it! I saw no change either in the character of the country, or of those by whom it is inhabited. Along the whole route, I saw men of the same blood—countrymen—brothers—sprung from a common stock,—and whose ancestors had battled, side by side, under the same glorious stars and stripes, upon many a well-fought field. I saw men who claim as a common inheritance the glories of Saratoga and Yorktown, Lundy's Lane and New Orleans, Buena Vista and Chapultepec! And I said to myself, "let them ever remain thus peaceful, thus united; and whom God has thus joined together, let no man put asunder!"

There was a time,—not more than ten years ago,—when no man could be found in any quarter of our glorious Republic, bold enough, mad enough, bad enough, to dare, seriously, to utter above his breath the word "Disunion." It was considered the most wicked—the foulest word in our whole vocabulary. But times have sadly changed for the worse. Not twelve months ago, we witnessed in the halls of our National Capitol, scenes sickening to every patriot heart. We heard the forbidden word "Disunion," daily repeated by Northern and Southern fanatics, until it had become the most common word in our vocabulary. We saw the strong pillars of our Government shaken to their deepest foundations. We saw our gallant ship of State tempest-tost upon a

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stormy sea,—the wild waves howling around her,—rocks and shoals upon every side,—and breakers ahead. We looked on with fear and anxiety,—and every man trembled for the result, while many abandoned themselves to despair. But, after a time, we saw skillful and patriotic pilots spring to the helm,—and, by their noble exertions, the gallant ship outrode the storm and all the dangers which beset her; and was at last moored in a calm and safe haven! A nation's thanks are due to those by whose almost superhuman efforts she was saved; and no true American can repeat without pride and gratitude the names of the gallant Harry of the West, the sage and patriotic Cass, the mighty Daniel of the North, the devoted and chivalric Foote!

I say the gallant old ship was moored in a haven of safety;—and every lover of his country fondly hoped that she would be permitted there to remain. But alas! we now find agitators,—fanatics at the North and at the South,—who loudly demand that she shall be again unmoored, and launched once more, freighted with all that is valuable and all that is dear to us, upon an unknown and tempestuous sea. It is to rebuke the mad counsels of such men—to show that such counsels meet no response from your bosoms, that this meeting has assembled to-night. You have met as Pennsylvanians, to say to your country and to the world—that whatever lot others may choose,—that you at least are determined to stand by the Union!—You have met to say, that Pennsylvania, whose mountains and vallies have been moistened by the blood of revolutionary patriots,—who claims as a part of her own soil the sacred fields of Paoli, Germantown, and Valley Forge—that she at least will still hold in grateful remembrance the name and deeds of the Father of his Country—and will still obey and fulfil his hallowed precepts. You have met to say, that Pennsylvania, in whose soil are laid the foundations of Independence Hall, where the Constitution was formed and the Union was made, that her sons are determined still to support that Constitution and maintain that Union!

Fellow-countrymen! you and I, and every American citizen with a true American heart in his breast, rejoiced at the passage of the acts by Congress, in September last, constituting what is very properly called the "Compromise." We rejoiced, because we fondly hoped that the passage of these measures would quiet, for the present generation at least, all ill-feeling and discord existing between the North and the South upon the question of slavery. We thought that Compromise was wise, fair and equitable. It has become the law of the land. If suffered to remain as it is,—if carried into effect by the parties to it,—this Compromise will accomplish the glorious object aimed at by the noble patriots by whom it was devised and passed.

Why should that Compromise be disturbed? What injustice is done by it to the North or to the South? Let us for a moment consider the measures which constitute this Compromise. They may be stated as follows:

First. The act establishing the boundary between Texas and New Mexico.

Second. The act admitting California as a State, with a provision in its constitution prohibiting slavery.

Third. The establishment of the territorial governments of New Mexico and Utah.

Fourth. The act abolishing the slave-trade in the District of Columbia.

Fifth. The act commonly called the fugitive slave bill.

These are the five measures constituting the Compromise. What one of them does any injustice to the North or to the South? Let us see.

As to the *first*,—the settlement of the Texas boundary,—this was neither a Northern or a Southern measure. Northern men and Southern men voted for it in about equal numbers. It was a *peace* measure,—calculated to preserve the Republic from internal strife. It has answered the purpose for which it was designed,—and Northern men and Southern men alike rejoice at the result.

As to the *second*, *third* and *fourth* of the measures referred to, they have been regarded at the South as Northern measures—passed to gratify free-soil feeling and to promote Northern interests. But what right has the South to complain of the passage of either of these measures?

She has no right to complain of the admission of California as a free State into the Union. The people of that territory had met in Convention and deliberately formed their constitution, with a provision excluding slavery. This they had a right to do. It was for them and them alone to frame the plan or constitution of their State government. No other State or States,—the people of no other State or States,—had a right to dictate the form of a State government for the people of California. If the constitution adopted by them was "Republican" in its character,—and the Territory possessed the requisite amount of population,—on their application for admission as a State, Congress was bound to admit them. This is the doctrine heretofore contended for by the South. In all her struggles to resist the application of the unjust and insulting Wilmot proviso, the general voice of her citizens has been—"Let the people of the Territories act for themselves—Do not prohibit them from holding slaves,—but let *them* choose whether they will have slavery among them or not." *Non-interference* has been the motto of the South. California, with her anti-slavery constitution, has been admitted upon this very principle,—and the South has no right to complain. If she had been admitted with a constitution tolerating slavery, what could prevent her citizens from meeting in Convention next year or the year after, and striking this feature from her constitution? Once admitted as a State, she would have the same right to amend or change her constitution, as any other State of the Union.

For the same reason, the South has no right to complain of the *third* measure of Compromise,—the organization of the territorial governments of Utah and New Mexico. The legislation of Congress on this subject, expressly recognizes and sanctions the principle that the present and future inhabitants of those Territories may enjoy the right of organizing their State governments, with or without slavery, as to them may seem best. With such legislation the South has no right to quarrel. *Southern* statesmen are chiefly responsible for the acts of the General Government, which resulted in the annexation of this territory, and if "an ordinance of Nature," or the "will of God," has prohibited the existence of slavery there, it may be the misfortune of the South, but certainly is not the fault of the North!

The *fourth* measure of the series, is the abolishment of the slave-trade in the District of Columbia. It is my opinion, formed upon mature deliberation, that the South has no right to complain of this measure. Under the Constitution, Congress had the right to enact it, and I can see no injustice which has been done to the slaveholding States by its passage. Maryland is a slave State,—and yet her Legislature, many years ago, passed an act prohibiting any person from bringing within her limits any slave *for the purpose of sale*. This act was passed by the representatives of slaveholders. They thought it wise, just and proper,—their constituents thought so too,—and it remained upon the statute book. Now, the act of Congress in reference to the District of Columbia is of a character precisely similar. The difference in the two cases is, that the legislators who regulate the internal government of Maryland are the representatives of a *slave State* only; but the legislators who regulate the government of the District of Columbia are the representatives both of *free* and *slave* States. The soil of the District is common ground;—and something should be yielded on both sides in a spirit of compromise. If it was not wrong for the Legislature of Maryland to prohibit the existence of the slave-trade there, I think it certainly was not wrong for the Congress of the United States to prohibit the existence of the slave-trade in the District of Columbia. The people of the southern counties of Maryland have the most interest in the latter act, and I have yet to hear of the first man from that quarter who makes any objection to its passage.

I therefore repeat once more, that the South has no right to complain of any of the measures embodied in the Compromise.

What right has the North to complain;—what injustice has been done to her? The only measure of the whole five, which has been objected to by any portion of the people of the North, is the act providing for the surrendering of fugitive slaves.

You have no shadow of right to object to the passage of this measure. It is your duty and your interest to see that its provisions are faithfully carried into effect. It only provides for the fulfilment of the sacred compact of the Constitution by which we are united as one people. Southern men are bound to obey that Constitution, and Northern men have no right to violate it. It was solemnly formed, in a spirit of compromise, by our common ancestors; it must be faithfully obeyed by their descendants. In no other way can they continue one great Republic,—one peaceful and united people. This act, so loudly denounced by the anti-slavery fanatics of the North, is nothing more nor less than the performance by Congress of a sacred duty enjoined by the Federal Constitution. No true American,—no man worthy to live under that Constitution,—can be willing to see it violated, either in the letter or the spirit; and no such man can, therefore, oppose any reasonable objection to the passage of an act like that to which I have referred.

You of the North may regard slavery as a moral sin, and a political evil. You have a right to entertain that opinion—and you have a right to prohibit the existence of slavery in your States. We do not censure you either for your opinions on this subject, or for the anti-slavery features of your State constitutions. But while we concede this right of free-thought and free-action to you, we claim the same privilege for ourselves. There was a time when

slavery was recognized and sanctioned by the constitution of Pennsylvania, and of almost every other northern State. The South then respected *your* rights;—and, under the provisions of the Federal Constitution, your fugitive slaves found among us were delivered up to their owners. You have seen proper to abolish slavery at the North,—while at the South it still exists. Now all that we ask of you is, that you shall do for us what we have done for you,—that you shall respect our rights as we have respected yours,—that you shall do your duty as we have done ours,—that you shall obey and perform the compromises of the Constitution as we have observed and performed them. What right have you to refuse to perform your part of the compact?

Do you regard slavery as a violation of the law of Nature—a moral sin? The Jews,—the chosen people of God,—did not so regard it. Ancient Greece,—the land of Liberty,—did not so regard it. Rome,—in her palmyest days,—when her Eagle was the banner-bird of the greatest of ancient *Republics*,—did not so regard it. In Judea, Greece, and Rome, slavery existed under the sanction of their laws. Your *own ancestors*,—a single generation back,—did not so regard it—for thousands of slaves—not *fugitives*—have trod the soil of Pennsylvania!

You may conscientiously believe that slavery is a sin and a political evil;—but still you have no right to quarrel with us if we should hold a different opinion. If it be a sin, it is one for which we are alone responsible—to our own consciences and to our God! You are not responsible for the sin, or liable for its punishment. If it be a social or political evil, we, among whom it exists, are the parties who suffer from the evil;—and it is for us to abolish it whenever we may think it expedient so to do. It is a matter entirely within the control of our local legislatures—and with which you have no more right to interfere than you have to meddle with the internal government of France, Russia or Prussia.

What would be the consequences if a different rule of action should be observed? Each State of the Union might find something to object to in the internal government of some sister State; and make this an excuse for refusing to fulfil in reference to that State the duties enjoined by the common Constitution.

In Maryland, our laws do not permit ardent spirits to be sold, or theatres to be opened on the Sabbath day. In Louisiana, I am informed, the law permits ardent spirits to be sold and theatres to be opened on the Sabbath. Now we might think this law of Louisiana to be immoral and sinful. But would this opinion justify the people of Maryland in abusing and traducing the people of Louisiana? Would this opinion justify the State of Maryland in refusing to perform towards Louisiana the duties enjoined by the Federal Constitution,—or in nullifying that Constitution? Certainly not.

We in Maryland have adopted a law by which a married woman is authorized to hold a certain amount of personal property,—the earnings of her own industry and enterprise,—separate from her husband and free from any liability for his debts. I believe that you have no such law in Pennsylvania. I believe that here all personal property of the wife,—even the fruits of her own labor or enterprise—belongs to the husband, and may be sold by his creditors to satisfy debts incurred by him. Now we consider that your law, in this respect, is unfair and unjust. We think you commit a flagrant outrage upon the natural rights of the wife, by making

her the *slave* of the husband! But we have no right to quarrel with you for this. We have no right, for this, to refuse to perform towards Pennsylvania the duties imposed upon our State by the National Constitution.

In like manner, you may think that we in Maryland do wrong to tolerate slavery; but you have no right, for that reason, to refuse to perform towards Maryland the duties imposed upon you by the Constitution of the Union. By that Constitution, you are bound to obey and perform the provisions of the fugitive slave act. Under that Constitution, the North has no right to complain of the passage of that act,—the only one of the whole five, which was enacted with a view to the protection of Southern rights and interests.

In this connection, permit me to add another word. The abolitionists of the North profess to be the greatest *friends* of the slaves of the South. They have, in fact, been their worst *enemies*. Twenty years ago, in Maryland, Virginia and other Southern States, the expediency and policy of providing by law for a gradual and prudent emancipation of their slaves, was freely and openly discussed and considered by many of their most influential statesmen. It appeared then, that it was more than possible that not very many years would pass before Maryland, Virginia and other Southern States would follow the example of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, by adopting systems for the gradual extinction of slavery within their borders, either by emancipation or colonization. But how does the question stand now? The incendiary publications of Northern fanatics were sent abroad. They told upon the slaves of the South. The Southampton insurrection showed to every Southern man that a mine was beneath his feet, which might on any night explode, to involve himself and family in one common destruction. The chains of the slave were bound more closely around him;—and it became to be regarded among Southern men as almost treason to utter the word “emancipation.” The success of that cause,—once seriously considered by Southern statesmen,—has been postponed for the present generation at least. For this, Northern meddling philanthropists may thank themselves! Let them consider this fact, and then calculate the great good their efforts have done to the slaves of the South!

Fellow-countrymen! this question, so fruitful of discord, so dangerous to be agitated, was settled for many years to come by the action of Congress in September last. That action should be satisfactory to the South and to the North. No injustice has been done to either, and neither has a right to complain. Shall that Compromise be disturbed? Fanatics at the far South and the extreme North answer “aye!” “Agitation” is their motto and watchword. Thank Heaven! such sentiments meet no response from the bosoms of Marylanders and Pennsylvanians! The citizens of both my State and yours have ever been upon the side of their country. Whenever and wherever the cause of that country required their aid, they have been found, like brothers, standing shoulder to shoulder beneath her glorious stars and stripes!

In the struggle for Independence,—those times “which tried men’s souls,”—when the capitol of your State was in danger, Marylanders were among the first to rush forward in her defence; and Maryland blood was freely poured out upon the memorable field of Brandywine! In later times, when Baltimore was menaced by a powerful and exulting foe, Pennsylvanians gallantly rushed forward

in her defence. A noble band,—from your own town,—were found in the thickest of the fight upon the well contested and glorious field of North Point; and the gallant deeds of Captain Spangler's York volunteers are still held in grateful remembrance by every citizen of Maryland! Yes, in seventy-six, in the struggles of eighteen hundred and twelve, in the late contest with Mexico, on every field where danger was to be met, or victory to be won, Marylanders and Pennsylvanians were found gathered together as one people under the glorious banner of their common country.

Thus let it ever be. We are now one people; we wish to remain so. Whatever may be the counsels and purposes of others, Maryland and Pennsylvania are determined to stand where they have ever stood, on the side of their country and the Union. Thank God!—neither Northern or Southern fanatics have been able to sow the seeds of discord among us. Thank God!—the air of my State and of yours is too pure for traitors to breathe!

Dissolution of the Union! Have those who seriously talk of it ever considered the awful, the inevitable consequences? We hear them speaking of a *peaceful* dissolution. Such a thing can never be. Let us once divide upon this question,—one appealing to the fiercest prejudices of our nature,—and there can be no peace between us. Let us calmly reflect for a moment—let us inquire what will be the situation of the North, and what of the South, should they divide upon this question?

The North would recognize slavery only as a social evil, a moral sin, a violation of the laws of Nature. The South would continue, as she now does, to regard the title of the master to his slave as clear, as inviolable, and as sacred as his title to his horse, his cow, or his farm. Upon this question they separate. Let me ask, if they should thus separate, would there be, could there be, any treaty between this Northern Republic, and this Southern Republic, in reference to the surrender by the former of the fugitive slaves belonging to the latter? Surely not. If the right of the South to have her fugitive slaves delivered up is not recognized now, when we are one people, it would certainly form no part of a treaty between the two Republics after we had separated upon this very question. What then would be the consequence? How long could these two Republics remain at peace? How long could the zealous philanthropists of the North abstain from meddling with the slaves belonging to a neighboring Republic? What would be the result? We are on the borders. No broad river—no Chinese wall divides my State from yours. How would we stand if portions of two separate nations? Let us see. To-day a slave belonging to a citizen of Baltimore county, in Maryland, escapes into York county, in Pennsylvania. The master and a party of friends pursue him. They are resisted by the citizens of your county, who harbor and protect the slave. Unable to recover their property, the Southern band, maddened by the insult and injury they have received, resort to acts of retaliation—the smoke and flames of your dwellings ascend to heaven,—and the blood of your wives and daughters redden your soil! On the next day, the friends of those who have been thus injured by the Southerners, issue forth to wreak vengeance upon those who have done the deed. They cross the line—and soon the smoke and flames of our dwellings are seen, and the blood of our wives and daughters redden our soil! This is no fancy sketch. Let the Union be divided upon this ques-

tion,—and the scenes which I have attempted to picture will be of daily occurrence. The forays upon the "Scottish border" will shrink into insignificance when compared to those which will be daily witnessed along Mason's and Dixon's Line.

Dissolve the Union! The thought is sickening to every honest American heart! How shall it be done? How shall we divide the Army? How the Navy? How shall we divide the glorious banner of stars and stripes first unfurled by the Father of his Country? How shall we divide the noble deeds and glorious names of our common ancestors? Shall we of the South be permitted no longer to claim as countrymen—Warren, Putnam, Hancock and Franklin? Shall you of the North be permitted no longer to claim as countrymen—Marion, Howard, Henry, Madison, Jefferson and Washington? Shall we be permitted no longer to visit the scenes of the glorious achievements of our ancestors—Saratoga, Monmouth and Germantown! Shall you be permitted no longer to visit the scenes of the glorious achievements of your ancestors—Eutaw, Cowpens and Yorktown? Shall we be denied the privilege of making our annual pilgrimages to the sacred precincts of Independence Hall—there to rekindle the fires of our patriotism? And shall you be denied the privilege of making your pilgrimages of patriotic devotion to the tomb of the Father of his country—amid the groves of his own loved Mount Vernon? Heaven forbid! Such things cannot, must not, will not be. God has decreed that we shall remain one great, free, peaceful, united people! The folly and the madness of his creatures cannot prevent the fulfilment of His solemn decree.

No—let us turn from the contemplation of a picture which can never be realized. Let us look at our country as she now is, and as she must still remain. Behold how she stands among the nations of the earth—"the land of the free and the home of the brave"—the asylum of the oppressed of every clime. Behold her commerce whitening every sea,—her flag floating upon every shore,—her name known, and her power respected by all nations—peace smiling upon her mountains and her vallies—plenty and prosperity throughout all her borders! Thus behold her! and then offer grateful thanks to God, that we are able still to say "we are American citizens!"

In ancient times, when the eagle of the Roman Republic had been borne triumphantly over the then civilized world, it was at once a source of pride and a talismanic word of protection from insult and injury, for any individual to say "I am a Roman citizen!" So in our days, when the name of our Republic is known throughout the world,—when her character is admired, and her power respected by every people—it is a glorious privilege for any man to be able truthfully to say, "I am an American citizen." Thus let it ever be. Let there be no discord among us—let us still remain peaceful, free and united; so that each one of us, whether from the North or the South—whether at home or abroad, may be able still to say, living or dying, with pride and exultation, and with thankfulness to God, "I am an American citizen!"



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